

ETIQUETTES OF KNOWLEDGE

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Etiquettes of Knowledge – Sheikh Haytham Sarhaan

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy.

The importance and virtue of knowledge and its people is not hidden from any Muslim. The religion of Islam is a religion of learning and implementing, and our scholars often say: “Allāh is not worshipped upon ignorance”. The importance of knowledge can be realized from the first word revealed in the Qur'an (meaning): **“Read in the name of your Lord.”** [96:1]

In addition to the above, there are a number of Āyāt in the Qur'an which emphasize the importance of learning in the life of a Muslim. Allah, the Most High, said (meaning):

“And say: 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.'” [20:114]

“Are those who know equal to those who know not?” [39:09]

“Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge.” [58:11]

“It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that truly fear Allah.” [35:28]

The Prophet ﷺ said, “Knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.” [Narrated by Anas Ibn Mālik; Collected by Ibn Mājah]

He also said, “When Allah wishes good for someone, He bestows upon him the understanding of the religion.” [Narrated by Mu'āwiyah; Collected by al-Bukhārī & Muslim]

He also said, “He who treads a path in seeking knowledge, Allah will make his path to Paradise easy. The Angels spread out their wings for the one seeking knowledge in happiness for the path he has adopted. All creation in the heavens and the earth, even the fish in the ocean seek forgiveness for the student of knowledge. The virtue of a scholar over a pious worshipper is like the superiority of the moon over all the other stars. Verily, the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets. The Prophets did not leave behind gold and silver coins rather they left behind Knowledge, and whoever acquires, has really acquired a great share [of goodness].” [Narrated by Abu Dardā; Collected by Tirmidhī & Abu Dāwūd]

He also said, “Envy is permitted only in two cases: A man whom Allāh gives wealth, and he disposes of it rightfully, and a man to whom Allāh gives knowledge which he applies and teaches it.” [Narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd; Collected by al-Bukhārī & Muslim]

Ibn Abbās said, “Once the Prophet embraced me and said, ‘O Allāh, teach him the meaning [of the Qur'an], and bestow upon him knowledge of the religion.’” [Narrated by Ibn Abbās; Collected by al-Bukhārī]

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The angel Jibrīl ؑ came to the Prophet ﷺ in the form of a man to seek knowledge. Umar described him, "his clothes were very white, and his hair very black. He sat close to the Prophet ﷺ, his knees touching the knees of the Prophet, and he placed his hands on his knees..." [Narrated by Umar Ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb; Collected by Muslim]

There are five things which have rights on a student of knowledge:

1. His own self
2. His teacher
3. The place he studies
4. His colleagues
5. His books
6. Knowledge itself

FIRST: RIGHTS OF ONE'S OWN SELF

Be a follower of the Salaf, maintain Taqwa, humble yourself and be careful of arrogance. Be content with what you have been given and avoid what will not benefit you in the next life. Adorn yourself with good manners; do not feel superior to your peers. Stay away from meetings and gatherings which have no benefit; be gentle with people but firm upon the truth; always verify information before passing a judgement. Have high ambitions, strong desire to seek knowledge; travel for knowledge, preserve the knowledge through writing, memorizing, acting upon it and revising it. Ask help from Allāh, respect academic integrity, and be truthful. Act upon the knowledge, flee from the love for leadership, fame, and the Dunya (this worldly life). Have good thoughts about others and be critical of your own self. Hold an appropriate stance or position regarding the mistake of a scholar, and the difference of opinion among the scholars. Repel doubts and do not be fanatical towards groups and parties; do not base your allegiance upon personalities rather love and hate for the sake of Allāh alone.

SECOND: RIGHTS OF ONE'S TEACHERS

Do not be extreme in praising and exaggerating the scholars and your teachers – this was the first avenue of Shirk; nor belittle their rights and status; defend them upon the truth; remain moderate and give them their due rights, they are the inheritors of the Prophets. Ask your teacher appropriate questions, listen carefully and understand. Do not interrupt him whilst he is speaking, do not ask questions for the sake of question or debating, rather only to seek the truth. If you see a short-coming from your Sheikh, know that perfection is for Allāh alone.

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THIRD: RIGHTS OF THE PLACE ONE STUDIES

Respect the place you study whether it is a university, classroom and more so a Masjid. This means keeping it litter-free, respecting the property such as chairs, tables and accessories. Always leave it in a state better than when you entered. The Masjid has further rights such as praying Tahiyat Al-Masjid when entering, not divulging in Dunya matters, refraining from backbiting and keeping it tidy.

FOURTH: RIGHTS OF ONE'S COLLEAGUES

You should know that your fellow students of knowledge are the best of people, as Allah said (meaning): **“You are the best nation chosen for the people, you enjoin goodness and forbid evil...”** [03:110] You must encourage and advise each other upon goodness, as Allah said (meaning): **“By time, verily mankind is in loss, except those who believe, do righteous actions, encourage each other upon the truth and enjoin each other patience.”** [103:1-3] The most perfect manners were summarized by our Prophet ﷺ in a very concise manner, he said: “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” This Hadeeth applies to all Muslims, and especially the students of knowledge amongst themselves.

FIFTH: RIGHTS OF ONE'S BOOKS

To preserve the book and take care of it. These books are a blessing from Allah, so it is a must to preserve them. Only write beneficial notes on them and do not draw shapes or needless messages. Only lend your book to a trustworthy person, and respect other people's books. Do not debase or belittle books by throwing them or placing them on the floor where people may step on them.

SIXTH: RIGHTS OF THE KNOWLEDGE ITSELF

Study it thoroughly and preserve it by reviewing it and acting upon it since it is obligatory for the one who has knowledge to act upon it. Then he teaches this knowledge since it is a blessing and he must be thankful for this blessing. Give the charity of knowledge by teaching it; enjoin the good, forbid the evil, outweigh the benefits and the harms, spread the knowledge and love to benefit the people, The 'paradise' of the student of knowledge is 'I don't know'; do not waste time, read in Arabic carefully and correctly, eventually read bigger books such as ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Muslim, etc. Be honorable, preserve knowledge, and stay away from teaching and positions before you are qualified for that; ascribe the benefit to its person.